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The orientation towards innovation of spa hotel management: the case of Romanian spa industry

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the orientation towards innovation of the Romanian hotel managers in the spa industry. In order to determine this aspect, a pilot study based on an online questionnaire was applied to the hotel employees working in the industry, by analyzing the openness to innovation and involvement of employees in the innovation process. Firstly, the literature regarding innovation in services, hospitality and innovation orientation was reviewed. Secondly, the contextual background in which the study was developed (the Romanian spa industry) was analyzed. Thirdly, the results of the pilot study undertaken in order to determine the innovation orientation of the hotel managers of the spa industry were presented.

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1. Introduction

Innovation is an intensely studied topic. In time, many definitions of the concept were framed by several researchers. One of the widespread definitions of innovation is given by the OECD's Oslo Manual. According to the Oslo Manual, an innovation is "the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations" (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). By analyzing several definitions of the innovation concept, it can be noticed that there are four different perspectives: many authors define

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innovation as a process, while other state that innovation can also be a function, an activity or a result. Either way, innovation is equivalent with the creation or development of something new.

In the tourism and hospitality industry, innovation research intensified after 2005. If before the 2000's, researchers were focusing their efforts on identifying the main particularities and types of innovation in tourism (Hjalager, 1997; Hjalager, 2002; Tetzschner & Herlau, 2003) or to analyze the innovation cases from the industry (Tetzschner & Herlau, 2003; Enz & Siguaw, 2003), after 2005 they started to investigate the relationship between innovation and other variables (Vila, Enz & Costa, 2012), to identify innovations' success factors (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005; Ottenbacher, 2007) or to analyze firms' innovative behavior and its determinants (Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes & Sørensen, 2007; Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; Meneses & Teixeira, 2011). Because most of these studies were undertaken in developed countries, with a high level of innovation, in this paper we approach the topic of innovation in a developing country. Therefore we consider it would have been radical to determine whether the Romanian spa industry innovates or not, so we chosen first to establish if there exists' orientation towards innovation.

This paper first gives a brief overview of the studies on innovation in services and hospitality and innovation orientation. After, it presents the context of research – the Romanian spa industry – and the research methodology, along with the main results that were obtained.

2. Innovation and innovation orientation in hospitality services

2.1. Innovation in services

Innovation in services or service innovation has its particularities that differentiate the concept from innovation in the industry sector. Gallouj and Weinstein (1997) stated that service innovation is characterized by service particularities such as intangibility, perishability or simultaneity, which also helps reduce the gap between the service provider and the consumer, gap that exists in other industries because there is no interaction between the two parties.

Therefore, defining service innovation is not an easy task. Kandampully and Duddy in Mudrak, van Wagenberg and Wubben defined it as follows: "Service innovation is the process through which a firm undertakes changes in its philosophy, culture, operations and procedures to add value to the result of the service or product for the benefit of the customer" (Mudrak, van Wagenberg & Wubben, 2005: 104). Another definition of the concept was suggested during the Cornell Hospitality Roundtable: "Service innovation is the introduction of new or novel ideas which focus on services that provide new ways of delivering a benefit, new service concepts, or new service business models through continuous operational improvement, technology, investment in employee performance, or management of the customer experience" (Verma et al., 2008: 8). This second definition of the concept is more complex than the first one, especially because the innovational efforts are fueled by the organization itself and by its employees, as well as by customer feedback.

Another aspect regarding service innovation, highlighted by Verma et al. (2008) refers to the key elements of service innovation:

- customer focused – in order to exceed the customer's expectations;
- process focused – to improve and adapt the products and services by using new technologies or new methods of organizing the innovation process;
- continuous improvement oriented – in order to seek out the tendencies in the industry that can provide intuitive services to the customer.

By focusing on the elements highlighted by Verma et al. (2008), a service providing organization can improve its innovative behavior, increase its competitive advantage or performance. Studies regarding the innovative behavior in hotels will be presented below.

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